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ABSTRACT

This brochure discusses parents' involvement in their children's education. It is maintained that parent involvement in education is one of the most promising movements to have come out of the school reforms of the 1980s. Recent history of parent involvement in American schools; several American educators' ideas about parent involvement; and benefits of parent involvement to parents, teachers and schools are briefly discussed. A section on research discusses the effect of parent support on student motivation and compares parent involvement in Japan to that in the U.S. Two challenges to cooperation between school and family are discussed: (1) teacher resistance; and (2) changes in family structure that make it difficult for parents to participate. Ways in which teachers can encourage parents to become involved in their children's education are detailed. Epstein's (1990) methods for parent involvement in their children's education; Sigel's concerns about Epstein's methods; and principles for school programs that encourage parent involvement are considered. Four parent involvement programs are discussed. A list of 11 references is included. (BC)

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The Parent Principle: Prerequisite for Educational Success

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Each issue of FOCUS discusses a critical problem in education and the work Educational Testing Service and others are doing to cope with it. Most widely known for its standardized tests, ETS is also a nonprofit educational research organization.

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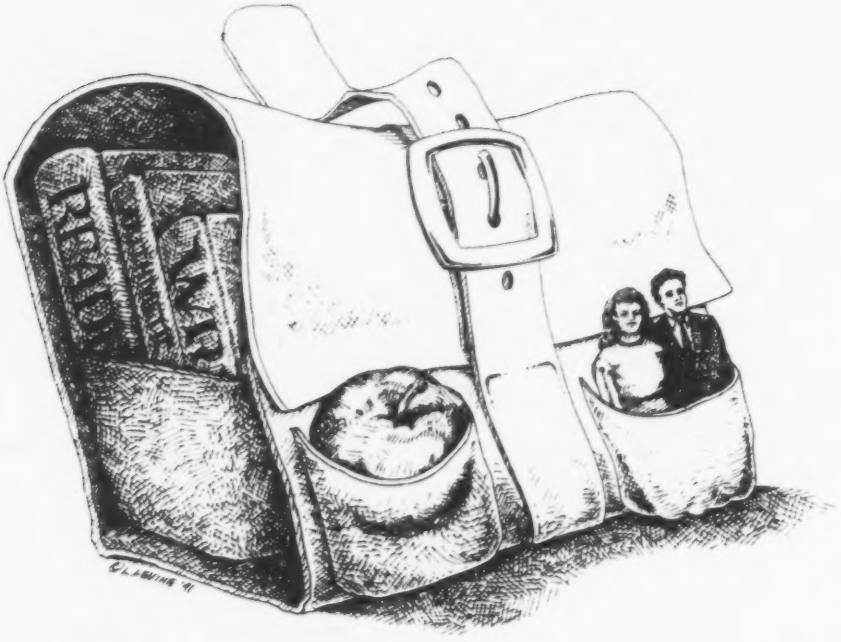
The Parent Principle: Prerequisite for Educational Success



As Michael's mom sits down in the molded plastic chair, facing the alphabet-decorated carpet of the reading corner, the 23 first-graders wiggle and talk, ignoring her.

But when she starts to read aloud, the room is magically transformed — the group falls silent, the wiggling ceases, and in a moment, each smooth-skinned child is engrossed in the story.

Even in the quiet, the energy of the classroom is palpable. The walls are covered with posters and artwork, yellow paper ribbons decorate the windows. One corner overflows with

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construction paper, cardboard tubes, and other art materials, another section is piled with book bags and jackets.

Waving slowly on strings from the ceiling are foot-high papers dolls dressed in brightly colored fabric remnants, obviously self portraits of the first-graders. Their blouses and shirts, slacks and skirts have been glued on by small hands, the hair of each doll, assembled from fabric, string, or yarn, is multi-colored and multi-textured.

In another section of the room, Philomena Gash, the teacher for this class in Irving School, Highland Park, N.J., busily arranges papers for the next assignment, and quietly distributes them to each desk. Before the session started she had been the center of activity for the children, a small crowd swirling around her at every move.

But once Michael's mom has started to read, not one set of eyes follows Gash at her work. Instead, the group gasps, moans, laughs, and yells "Oh, no!" at appropriate moments as the story reading progresses. One girl quietly sucks her two middle fingers as she concentrates.

Once the last page is turned, the magic ends, and their comments burst the silence — "That was funny!" and, "A python isn't poisonous, it just strangles you."

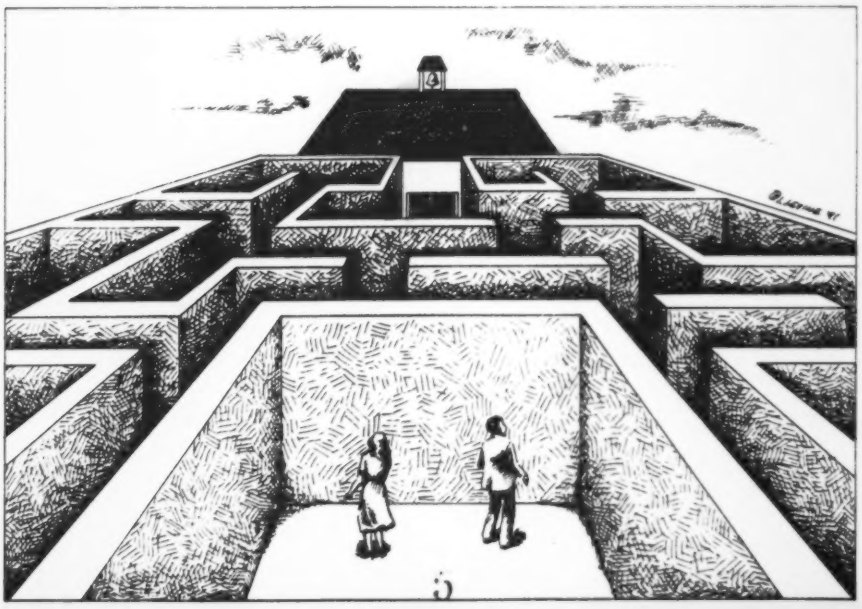
For a few minutes, all their energy is directed to Michael's mom, with several students at once trying to tell her whether they liked the story, and how they would have handled the situation. Then, in another minute, Gash again takes charge of the class, directing the children to their desks where their next project awaits them.

Why Are Mom and Dad Going to School?

This classroom scene is an example of just one of the many ways that increasing numbers of parents nationwide are choosing to become involved with their children's education.

Rare at the start of the last decade, parent-school interactions are atypical even today. A growing body of research clearly shows, however, that parent involvement in education is one of the most promising movements to have come out of the school reform decade of the 1980s. As the numbers and types of these parent-school interactions grow, their potential to change America's schools — and through them, American society — grows as well.

Ever since America's system of public education was institutionalized, near the turn of the century, parents have gradually lost their direct connection to their children's education. Once most parents



stopped teaching their children in their own homes, they and their children both began to depend on the schools for education.

Eventually, teaching became a recognized, specialized profession, and parents were taught that the education of their children was best left to the professionals. By mid-century the connection between parents and schools was often tenuous. Except perhaps in the area of fund-raising, most schools generally rejected parental advice, opinions, or help.

"One of the main reasons that parents feel shut out by the educational system is because they did not fully understand their own school when they were students. . . . School remains impregnable — a mysterious edifice into which the parent is allowed entry only during conferences, occasional Parent Teachers Association meetings, and special visiting times," write Murray Kappelman and Paul Ackerman in *Between Parent & School*, published in 1977.

Eventually, the impregnable walls of the schools left parents outside the educational process. The question, "What did you learn in school today?" became a cliche by mid-century, but was an indicator of how little parents actually knew about what happened in the schools.

By the 1960s, however, the shock of America's loss to the U.S.S.R. at the start of the space race, combined with falling proficiency-test scores, led to a reexamination of traditional teaching and an exploration of new roles and methods for the nation's schools.

One of the most innovative programs to come out of this crisis was Head Start, initiated in 1964. Head Start provided disadvantaged preschool children with enrichment activities, and also mandated that parents become involved in the learning process.

Although the program succeeded in giving children a head start in their schoolwork, research showed that when the children went off to a regular school program, they often were not as successful as their early Head Start progress indicated they would be.

After a number of years, researchers began to recognize that the program's success was due, in part, to its parent involvement component. Without it, regular school programs could not support the students' early gains.

By 1978, Urie Bronfenbrenner, an education researcher from Cornell University, had noted the connection between parent involvement and student success. He developed a number of proposals to reverse what he called the "progressive deterioration" of the structure and position of the American family and of the behavior and development of children.

Discussing the problem in the book *Educational Reform for a Changing Society,* Bronfenbrenner says, "in the recent past, the principal focus of attention and programmatic effort has been the child, and in the context not of the family but of the school."

Intervention efforts, he points out, were "effective while they lasted, but gains tended to wash out once the children entered school. . . . The only exception to this general trend occurred with programs emphasizing the direct involvement of parents in activities with their children. But the success of this approach was qualified by

the realization that the families who were willing and able to participate in these programs tended to be the least disadvantaged among those eligible."

"As Project Head Start demonstrated," Bronfenbrenner says, "preschool programs can have no lasting constructive impact on the child's development unless they affect not only the child himself but also the people who constitute his enduring day-to-day environment. . . . It means that the program cannot be confined to the [day care] center but must reach out into the home and the community so that the entire neighborhood is caught up in activities in behalf of its children."

While teachers and education researchers took some time to recognize the importance of continuing parent involvement in the schools, the parents themselves recognized more quickly how effective they could be.

"Once Head Start parents were told they were important to the educational process, once they became involved, they believed it, and they often wanted to stay involved as their children progressed through school," says Joyce Epstein, head of the Center for Research on Elementary and Middle Schools at The Johns Hopkins University.

At the same time, more middle- and upper-class mothers were finishing college and entering the work force, Epstein says. As their education and experience widened, they began to realize that they had a lot to offer to their children's education, and they were no longer content to relinquish responsibility when their children toddled off to kindergarten.

"So the push for more involvement really started at both ends of the socioeconomic spectrum," says Epstein.

The need for comprehensive educational reforms was brought to the top of the political agenda in 1983 with the publication of the landmark Department of Education report, *A Nation At Risk*. The report provided statistics showing that children were not learning the basic skills they needed to succeed in higher education, to survive in the work force, or to become informed citizens. While schoolwork was suffering, the nation's cities and towns suffered as well, with illiteracy, unemployment, crime, and poverty.

Ironically, *A Nation At Risk* made only passing reference to the subject of parent involvement. While the report noted that parents are their children's "most important teachers," it did not propose or recommend ways for parents to take a larger role in education.

The report did, however, prompt a flood of educational research and a search for more effective teaching methods, both of which continue today.

While the research in many areas is still inconclusive, one finding has been confirmed — parent involvement in education works. In case after case, when programs encouraged or mandated parents to become involved with their children's education, they and their children profited. Working as a team, the parents and their children enhanced their potential to contribute to society; parents, schools, and society all benefited.

Involvement Benefits Parent, Teacher, and School

Gash's class provides a glimpse into the advantages realized by the teacher, the children, the parents and the school when parents and schools interact closely.

The reader in the classroom was Frima Fox Hofrichter, a mother and a professor of art history at Rutgers University, who feels that the reading sessions benefit both her and her son.

"I like coming in to read this way," Hofrichter comments. "It's a good chance to become familiar with what the class looks like and to relate it to what they're doing.

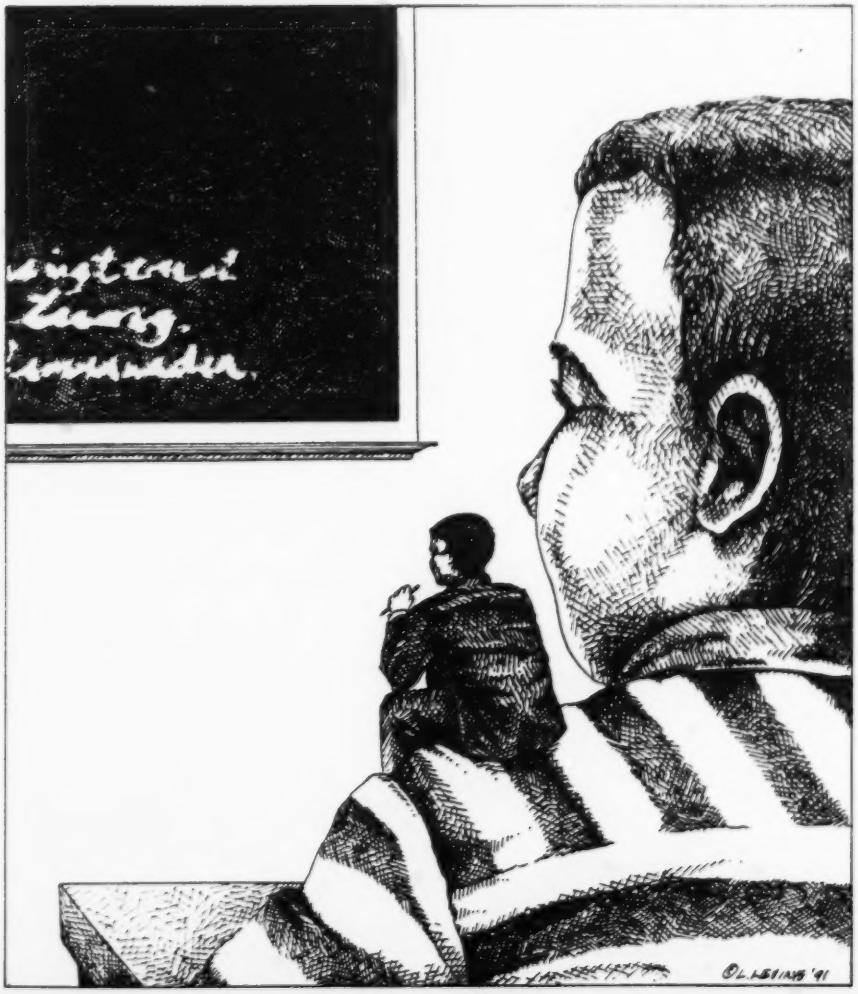
"When I first started to come in to read, other parents would often ask me about what was happening in the classroom and what the class was like.

"I just come in once a week, and just for 15 minutes or so to read the story, so it really doesn't demand too much time — it doesn't fill up the day. And I like knowing that it's not that I'm doing the teacher's work for her, I'm here for too short a time for that, and Mrs. Gash is usually right here in the class with me. It's just a treat for the kids. My son likes having me come in."

Gash sees the advantages of the parent reading program from an even broader perspective.

"For one thing, the parents who come in really want to be here, so they make an effort to go to the library, or bring in books of their own that the children will like. They'll often bring in books that are new to me, too, so the program helps expose the children to different kinds of literature than I would select myself.

"This also gives me a chance to meet the parents, and it gives them a chance to meet me. Then if I can't



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reach out to one parent or another, or if they're working and can't come into the school, the other parents in the classroom can report to each other about the class — what we are doing and whether the classroom functions well. And it helps the parents have a better understanding of what I'm trying to do in the classroom, and how hard it is to meet the demands of a class full of children."

A concerned and enthusiastic teacher for over 20 years, Gash says that she has always made an effort to reach out to the parents, even in the upper elementary grades. This volunteer reading program, however, started about eight years ago for a physical reason.

"I was having trouble with my voice," she says. "The doctor told me to try and rest it, but you can't do that when you have to handle a class of children. So I started asking the parents if they would come in and read. The kids have always loved it."

At the start of each school year, Gash asks parents to sign up for a time slot when they can come in and read and also asks if they have any special skills or interests they can share with the classes. Often, the parents who can't come into the classroom on a regular basis to read can at least make arrangements for a one-day talk with the students about their career, their hobby, or a special interest.

Even a one-day project helps to spark the parent's interest in the class, Gash finds. "Getting them in is more important than what they do," she says.

"It's hard to teach without the parents being interested in their child," she says. "Parents are the only ones who oversee the child's entire education, they really *are* responsible because they have that child every day."

In addition to learning about the class and enriching the curriculum for the children, the parents can also help the teacher, Gash says, by providing a "spark" to the learning process.

"I don't think I would have made it in teaching all these years without the parents," Gash says. "The

"Parents are the only ones who oversee the child's entire education . . . they have that child every day."

parents have such a lot to offer. Every year I get to see new parents with different approaches to life and different experiences they can share, so it broadens what I can do in the class — it really opens up the world for the kids.

"I've had a parent from Guatemala who came in and talked about the country's history and geography. And she shared some folktales. So I planned the whole day around it — we looked at the map, and talked about that culture and the way of life.

"I think the things kids remember in school are the experiences that are fun — that's the way to really help them learn."

The principal of Irving School, Andrew Mignano, notes that in dealing with young children, "we need to have very strong links to the community. We stress that this is a school family, and we try to get parents involved in all the school projects."

One year, the entire school concentrated on fairy tales, and the parents were then invited to walk through the school and the classrooms to look at the projects. Another time, the school sponsored a weekend fun day, which included parent-child events.

"The reading program, too, is a way to give the parents the message that we value their participation and their efforts. They're more willing to listen to what we have to say if we start out with a good rapport," Mignano says.

One of Mignano's goals, in the two years that he has been principal, was to bring the school in line with the latest research on early childhood education. "And the research says that the child benefits most when the parent is involved in the child's education," he says.

Research Supports Parent-Teacher Links

"When I first started doing research in this area, back in the 1970s," says Joyce Epstein of Johns Hopkins, "we were studying the first-generational questions about families and schools, discussing *whether* the families were important and influential in a child's education. It was a subject that researchers had not investigated at the time."

As time went on, Epstein says, the results of her own and other studies continued to be overwhelmingly supportive of parent involvement. In a 1989 report she writes, "Research conducted for nearly a quarter century has shown convincingly that parent involvement is important for children's learning, attitudes about school, and aspirations."

One reason for the impact of parent involvement is that it helps to counter low motivation, one of the obstacles to learning that teachers find difficult to neutralize with classwork alone. When parents support the importance of school, the teachers' task of motivating students becomes easier.

"The more parents can understand and support what teachers do, the more they can help their children," report Raymond J. Wlodkowski and Judith H. Jaynes in their 1990 book, *Eager To Learn*. "The greater the positive relationship between teachers and parents in what they say and do about children learning, the more powerful their mutual influence can be upon children."

"Based on research to date, as well as our own clinical experience," the authors state, "parents appear to be the primary influence on a child's motivation to learn. Their formative effect on their children's motivation to learn has an impact

at every stage of development, lasting through the high school years and beyond."

The four major influences on a child's motivation to learn, Wlodkowski and Jaynes write, are the culture, the family, the school, and the child herself or himself. The value that the child's culture places on learning is transmitted in many ways, the authors state, including through religion, the myths and folklore of the country, the political status of education, the status and pay of teachers, and through expectations concerning what parents should do to prepare their children for school.

As an example of the influence of culture, the authors point to the exceptionally high academic achievement shown in the United States by Japanese Americans. The academic accomplishments of this ethnic group, say the authors, "far outdistances the relative proportion of their numbers in our society. Culture appears to have much to do with this circumstance. . . . The Japanese culture places a high value on educational success, and achievement in school is seen as strongly related to personal virtue. This view is woven into the very fabric of Japanese cultural values. . . . The most highly esteemed accomplishments are those that are seen to result from the concerted efforts, over time, of both the student and the family. Studies indicate that Japanese mothers and their children emphasize effort . . . as a primary means to good school performance."

In Japan, the education of children "receives a top priority. Parents are committed to institutional efforts to educate their children, and teachers receive considerable respect and support from them."

The goal of educational reform programs in the United States is not to reproduce Japanese society, but to adapt some of its commitment and motivation to American society, points out Irving Sigel, an expert in child development at Educational Testing Service.

"Japanese culture is very different from ours, and we would not be able to duplicate it," Sigel says. What the United States can do, he says, is "look at our *own* society to see how we can improve."

In the United States, private Catholic schools, which have a high student success rate, provide support for education that is similar to the community commitment of the Japanese. Studies conducted in the early 1980s revealed that high school seniors in Catholic high schools scored higher than their peers in public schools, even after family backgrounds are taken into account. The difference in the scores can be attributed to "different orientations to schooling," according to *Education & American Youth*, written in 1988 by Ruth B. Ekstrom, Margaret E. Goertz and Donald A. Rock, all of Educational Testing Service. (The authors credit studies by James Coleman as their source for this information.)

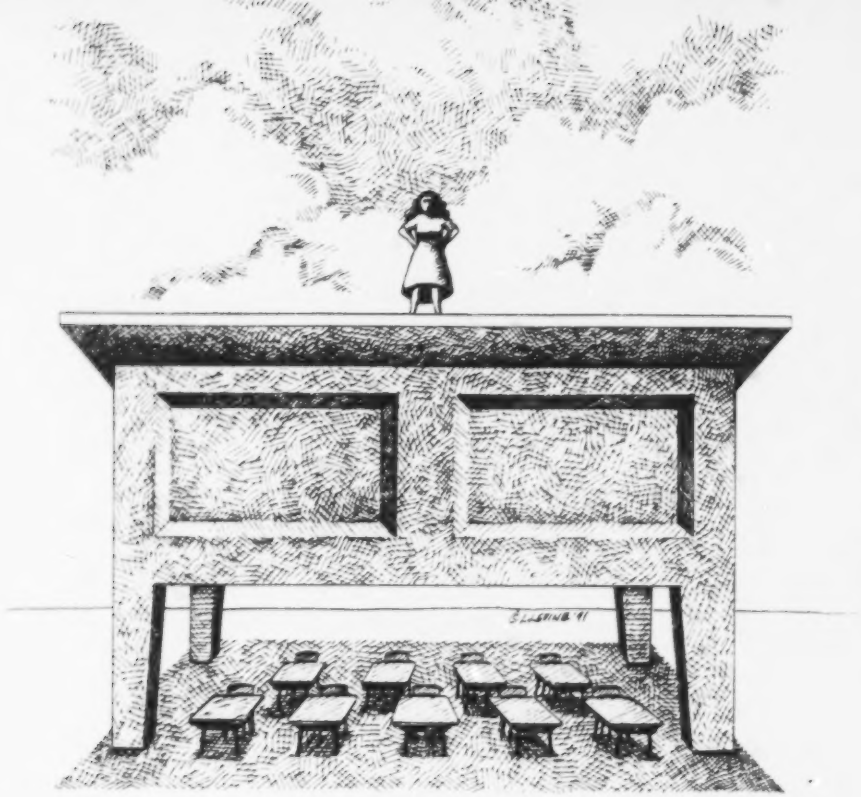
"The public school is viewed as an agent of the larger society or the state; its purpose is to 'free the child from constraints imposed by the accident of birth.' . . . Catholic schools are part of a functional community, representing families with shared values," say the authors.

It is this feeling of sharing and participating in the goals of a family, the authors say, that improves the students' educational success.

Defining School Success

Because the schools deal with all of America's youth, they are often perceived as a tool to help manage the nation's social problems, points out Warren Chapman, an educational consultant for the Illinois State Board of Education, in an article in the January 1991 issue of *Phi Delta Kappan*.

"For more than three decades, we have assigned schools a myriad of tasks," he writes, including "developing students' academic achievement, helping individuals contribute to and flourish in society,



enhancing social equality and social progress, and increasing understanding of cultural diversity."

In addition, schools today are being asked "to Americanize immigrants, to delay the entry of young people into the labor market, to serve as custodians of children during certain hours of the day, to help desegregate society, to battle drug abuse, to improve the health of students. . . ."

In order to be considered successful, school must address all these needs. However, Chapman says, "the resources of the schools alone are insufficient. . . ."

Challenges to Cooperation: Teacher Resistance

It would seem that the schools would welcome the development of programs that would help them accomplish their diverse and obviously vital social and educational roles. Yet despite the strong confirmation, by statistics and research reports, of the benefits of parent involvement, programs are still rare and resistance from teachers is often strong.

Some of the resistance may be attributed to the long tradition of separating home and school. In her 1978 book, *Worlds Apart: Relationships Between Families and Schools*, Sara Lawrence Lightfoot writes that she has observed teachers who attempt to exclude families from school life. "They seem to want to establish an exclusive, isolated environment, free from the intrusions of parents," she says.

"Behind the classroom door, teachers experience some measure of autonomy and relief from parental scrutiny, and parents often feel, with shocking recognition, the exclusion and separation from their child's world. If teachers welcome the parents within their classrooms, they usually ask them to observe

rather than participate and they view their presence as temporary and peripheral to the classroom experiences of children."

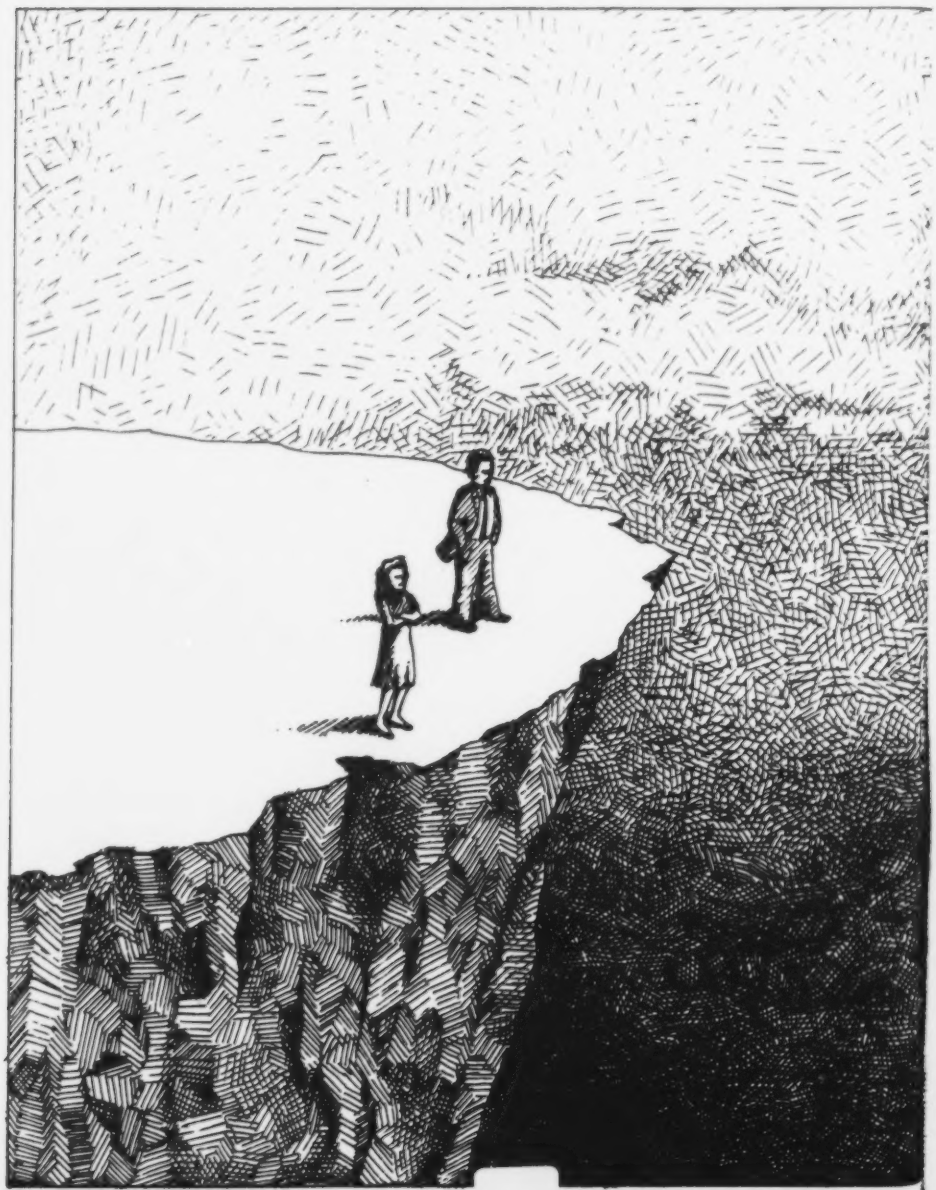
Not only might teachers feel obliged to protect their autonomy, they might also believe that the separation of home and school will wean the child from the self-oriented atmosphere of the home to the other-oriented outside world, Lightfoot says.

The teachers that she observed, she writes, often "saw themselves as child advocates, protectors of the child's new domain, and they stressed the developmental and emotional needs for a clear and early separation between familial patterns and the demands made upon children in school."

Territoriality, as Lightfoot characterizes the problem, "seems to be motivated by both positive and negative reasoning."

Teachers may also resist the concept of parent involvement because they find it an impossible goal. In an article in the December 1990 issue of *Phi Delta Kappan*, for example, two teachers detailed their experiences with parents who were not concerned with their children's education, did not want to become involved, or lacked the skills needed to support their children.

The article described an instance of a parent who could not read to her children because she could not read herself. It also described children who did not have their homework signed because their parents said they were too busy for "school stuff."



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Once teachers are burned with experiences such as these, they are less likely to reach out to parents, the article pointed out.

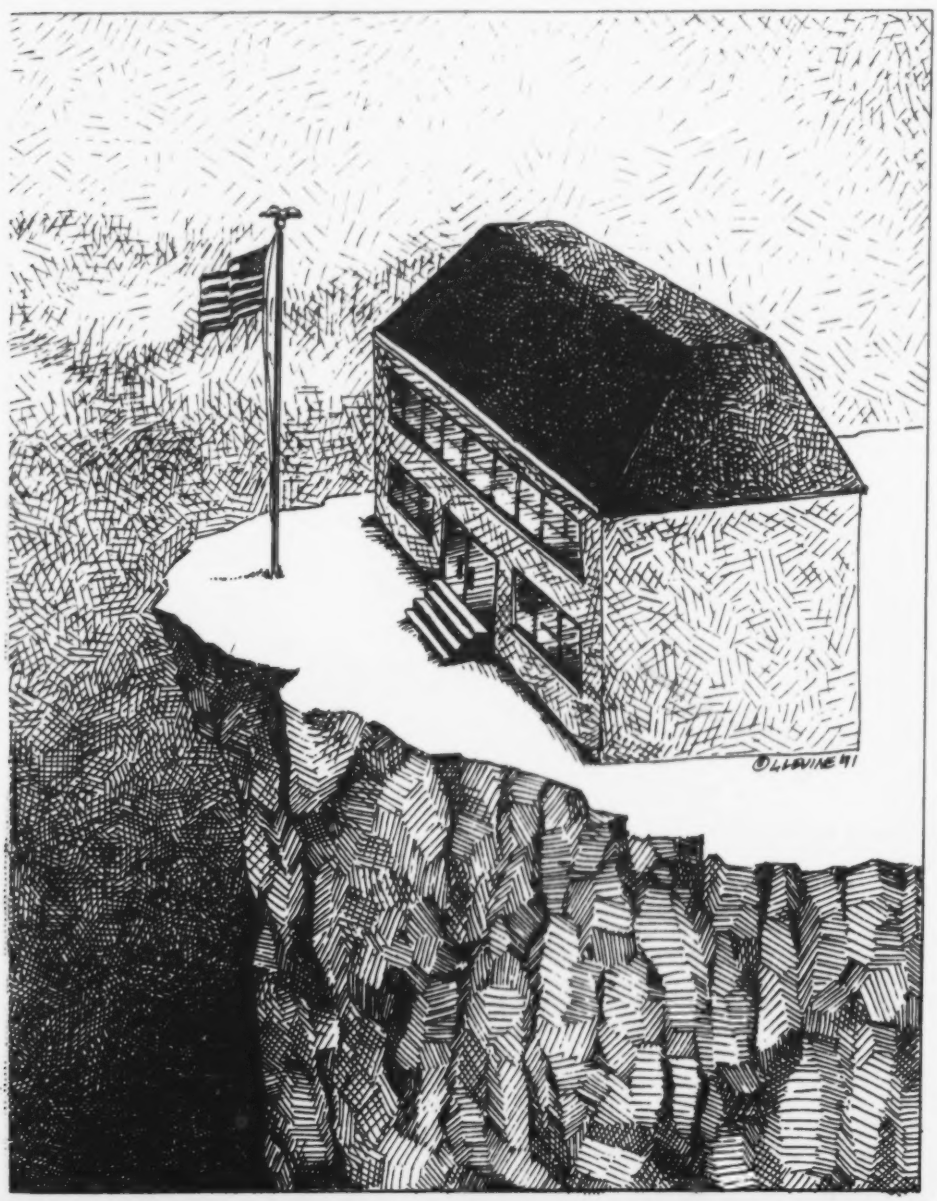
The problem of teacher resistance is no secret, especially to education researchers who are familiar with the studies supporting family involvement.

Luis M. Laosa, an education researcher at Educational Testing Service, has conducted a number of studies concerning the relationship of families and school. As he explains, "there is a tendency among educators, as with all professional groups, to build purview boundaries." These boundaries, he says, often result in a dilemma for the professional educator.

"How does one solve the potential situation in which the parents of every child come to the schools, telling the teachers what to do, saying, well, these are my children, and I want you to teach them according to what I value. The point is," he says, "on what level is parent involvement constructive and useful, and on what level is it dysfunctional."

Irving School Principal Mignano also recognizes that teachers may resist parent input and counters that feeling by emphasizing the advantages of interaction to the teachers in his school.

"Once you have a rapport with parents," he tells them, "then any problems that arise are easier to handle. If the parents come into the



school, they have a better perspective, and they are more willing to listen to what we have to say."

The few times she has had problems with parents in the classroom, Gash says, the difficulty has stemmed from the parents criticizing their own or other children, or interfering with her work. Usually, she says, a firm but polite comment or two is all she finds necessary to let them know their behavior is inappropriate. In eight years, she says, she had to ask only one parent not to return.

"If the school or the teachers are afraid to have the parents come in," Mignano points out to teachers, "then what kind of a message does that send to the parents? They start thinking, what's wrong? It sends a very negative image. The more contact that the teachers and the parents have, the better their rapport."

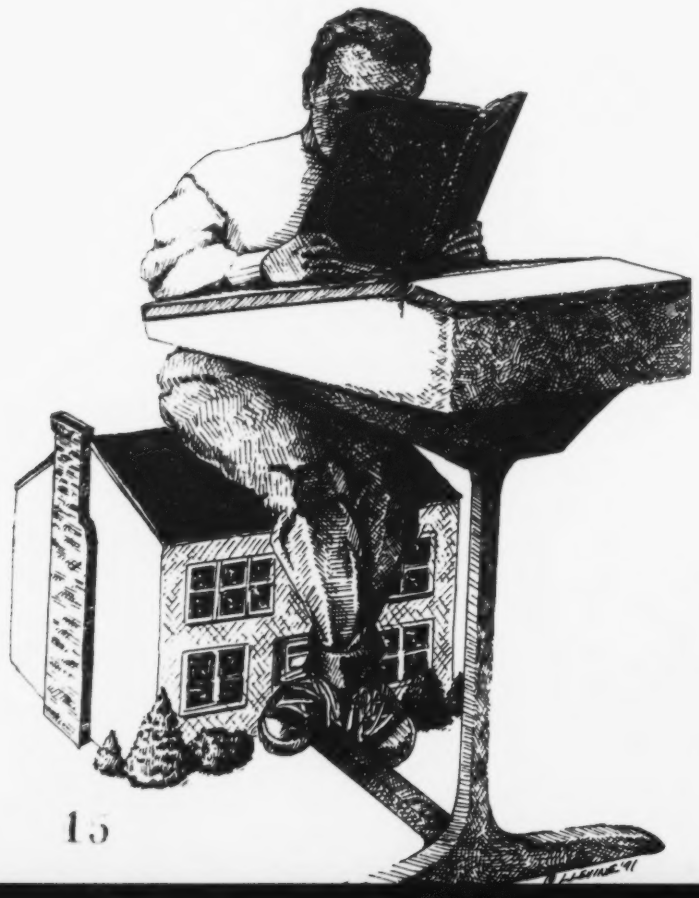
Lee Canter, who has developed a book and training program for teachers titled *Parents On Your Side,* points out that the educational system is based on the ideal that parents will support education, but today's changing society has changed the rules of the game — many families today either do not support the goals of education or do not know how to provide this support for their children.

A popular speaker at educational association gatherings, Canter advises teachers that parent involvement is crucial to their goal of educating students. Even if they have uncomfortable experiences at times, he says, it is up to the teachers to make sure they get the support they need to do their job.

Students are generally more successful when their teachers are supported by their parents, Canter tells the educators. The most effective teachers, he says, "are *dedicated* to involving the parents in education. They *know* they can't do it on their own."

The research of Lightfoot and Laosa supports both Mignano and Canter in their views on teacher outreach.

Lightfoot suggests that a close and continuing communication between parents and teachers would counter teacher territoriality and fear of conflict with parents.



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"One way of easing the tension," she writes, "would obviously be by clarifying areas of responsibility and competence between parents and teachers and providing effective modes for communicating distrust and relieving anxiety.

"One of the reasons why the struggles over territoriality are rarely articulated, clarified, and resolved is because there are very few opportunities for parents and teachers to come together for meaningful, substantive discussion."

Laosa agrees but points out that such communication provides a real challenge for both teachers and parents.

"The way that many schools are organized now, many teachers don't have time to spend with parents. Why not have a regular time period in the public schools that allows every teacher time to devote to working in the area of parent involvement?" he asks. "Of course, if parent involvement helps, there *should* be some mechanism to allow teachers to reach out systematically to the parents."

Challenges to Cooperation: Changing Families

Not all of the problems with initiating parent-teacher communication, of course, rest with the teachers; some difficulties arise out of the nature of today's American family.

The latest census reports reveal that the percentage of "traditional" two-parent families is declining, and new family structures and demands offer a challenge for any program that depends on family interaction.

Last year, in fact, "only 26 percent of U.S. families consisted of a married couple with children under age 18, compared with 31 percent in 1980 and 40 percent in 1970," according to U.S. Bureau of the Census figures, quoted in a February, 1991, article in *Education Week*.

Instead, the census reveals, the number of single-parent families has increased some 2.8 million, to a total of 9.7 million, nearly all headed by women.

Although it may be difficult for some schools to change their procedures to adapt to America's changing families, organizations such as the National PTA, which deals directly with families, have long recognized the problem.

The PTA encourages both its local chapters and the schools themselves to develop innovative techniques to deal with these challenges, says Anne Lynch, president of the 6.8 million-member organization.

"Schools need to have parent-teacher conferences in the evenings and on Saturdays," Lynch says, to avoid the usual conflict of business and school schedules. In addition, she says, "we have many other suggestions for making teachers more accessible to parents, such as putting telephones in the classroom, so teachers can call parents while the children are working on other projects. Or we're telling teachers to use FAX machines to send notes to parents.

"We also recommend that businesses look at their benefits for parents — we support flex time — so that parents can meet their obligations as parents. That way, if parents have to attend a school

function, they can make up the time on a Saturday morning or in the evening. They should offer flexible time and a flexible schedule so the parent can spend time with their child's school activities when they need it."

As for the PTA, Lynch is emphatic in her recommendation that daytime PTA meetings should be eliminated. She also recommends that local groups hold multiple meetings as a way to meet varied work and family schedules. "They could have one at 6 a.m. before work, one at 7:30 p.m., and one on a Saturday morning, so all parents can attend. They can run movies for the kids to watch while the parents are at the meeting."

In her first-grade classroom, Gash also recognizes the challenges of dealing with non-traditional families. Although her reading program asks parents to make the commitment to come into school once a week, she tries to make the program flexible. One parent, for example, comes in only one day a month instead of once a week. Some parents can only take off one day out of the school year for an activity, so they come in for a "sharing" day, to discuss their job or hobby. The parents who cannot come into the classroom at all are kept informed by frequent school newsletters.

Teachers Can Help Parents Become Involved

The concept of parent involvement in education may not be new to education researchers, or even to teachers, but few parents are familiar with the latest research. Even if their parental instincts tell them they should be acquainted with their child's school activities, they probably do not know that research supports their beliefs; they need teachers and school administrators to encourage their participation.

"Most schools leave it up to families to decide whether and how to become involved with their children's schools," Epstein writes in a report in the 1990 book, *Families in Community Settings: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*.

"This means that some families are highly involved in their children's education and provide important guidance for their children, whereas other families are not involved much at all. Increasingly, schools are changing their laissez-faire practices concerning the family by designing and conducting programs to help more families become 'knowledgeable partners' in their children's education. Legitimate and comprehensive school and family partnerships should alter the basic roles and behaviors of the average family and change the practices of the typical school."

Research in the 1980s revealed that, typically, when teachers do not specifically seek contact with parents, better educated parents tend to become more involved with the schools, and the result is higher achievement for their children, Epstein says.

The research "prompts new questions about whether and how schools can successfully involve all parents in their children's education — especially those parents who are not likely to become involved on their own."

An important point, Epstein emphasizes, is that research does not investigate whether less-educated parents do not want to become involved with their children, or whether teacher practices have inhibited their interactions.

"It *isn't* just a family responsibility to get involved, but it is a school responsibility to *get* parents involved," Epstein says. "There needs to be training for teachers to get this across, either in-service or pre-service training programs, and not just for teachers, but also for principals and administrators."

Types of Involvement Programs

Perhaps because of the wide range of variables involved — schools in both urban and suburban, rich and poor districts; parents and children of varying educational backgrounds, socioeconomic status, ethnic origin, religions, and races; teachers and school administrators from equally varied backgrounds — researchers have been exploring a wide variety of programs designed to spur parent involvement. No single program has emerged as the most successful, and researchers seem to favor school-based innovations designed specifically for individual schools.

Epstein's innovative and focused research in this area has, however, established five general methods by which parents can become involved in their children's education. The methods are outlined in the 1990 report, *School Programs and Teacher Practices of Parent Involvement in Inner-City Elementary and Middle Schools.*

The first method involves the basic obligations of families and includes providing for children's health and safety; developing parenting skills to prepare children for school and to maintain healthy development over the years; and building positive home conditions to support appropriate learning and behavior. Schools can help with these basic family obligations by assisting the families in building their knowledge and skills to achieve these goals, through workshops or other programs.

The next method, involving basic obligations of schools, includes the

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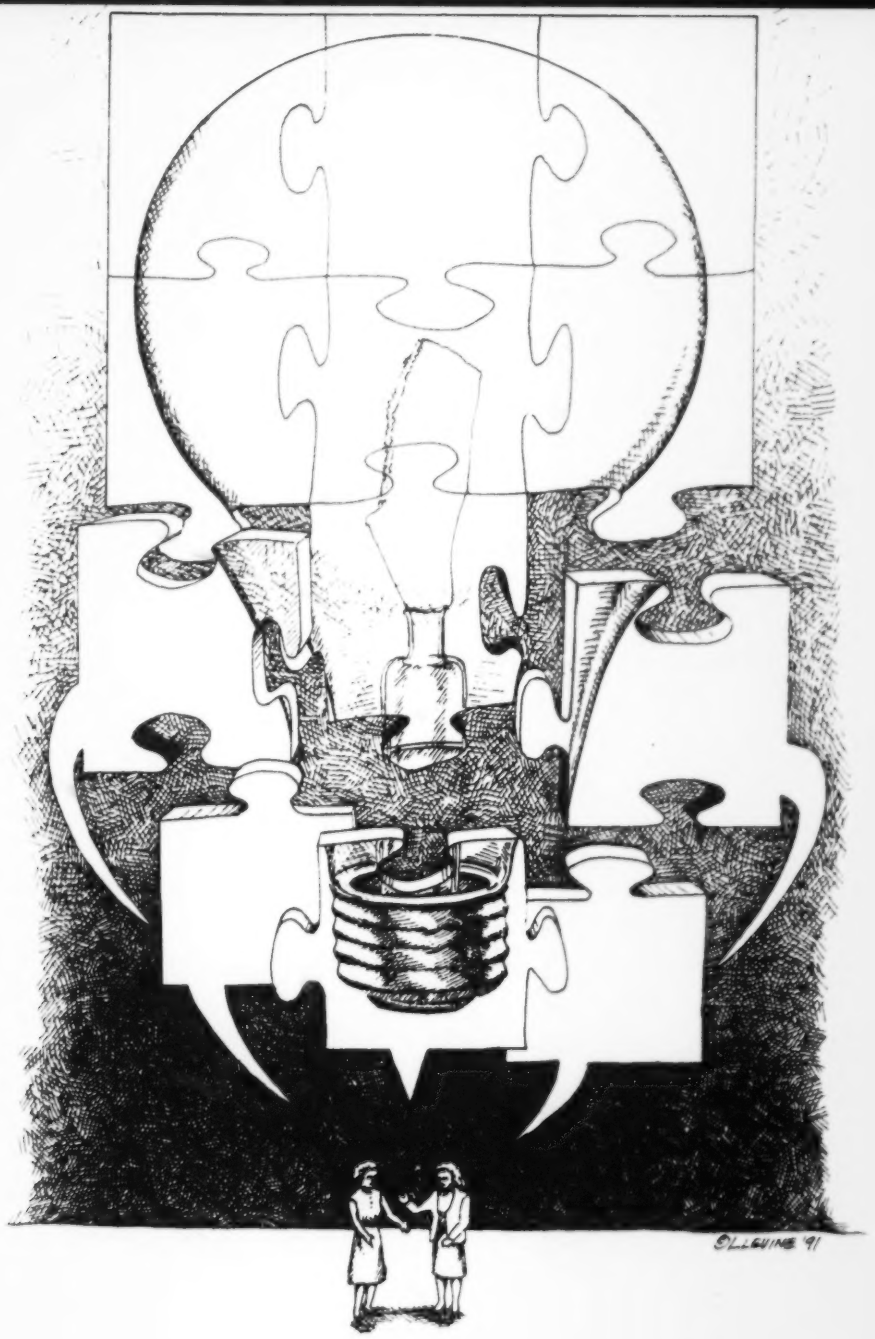

obligation for schools to communicate with families about programs and about their children's progress through memos, notes, phone calls, etc.

Involvement at school is the third method. This involves programs that include parents and other volunteers who help in the school building or classroom, or who support, through attendance or otherwise, student activities such as performances and sports events.

The fourth method is involvement in learning activities at home, including guidance or actual assignments from teachers to parents and children designed to include parents in their children's work at home. The schools can help in this effort by providing information and guidance to parents on the most effective methods to carry out this interaction.

The final method is involvement in decision making, including governance and advocacy in the community, in the PTA/PTO, in advisory councils, and in Chapter 1

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programs or other committees at the school, district, or state level.

The reading program that Gash uses in her classroom, and Mignano's parent participation programs, are examples of the types of programs being explored in schools across the country.

Some researchers, such as ETS's Sigel, have concerns about parent involvement programs that can become intrusive to a family's home life. The drawback to some forms of teacher outreach, he points out, is that they can imply that the child and parent are not interacting enough together, so the school is intervening to formalize this interaction.

"The implication is that the teacher is directing the parents, making sure they get involved in their child's schoolwork. But the parent and child should relate to each other in the way that they evolve through their own family," he says.

"I don't want to do my child's homework, and it's intrusive for the teacher to tell me how to interact with my own child," Sigel emphasizes. "If the teachers have to assign homework, let them assign homework to the child, but not to me."

Sigel does, however, find merit in the first of Epstein's categories of interaction, in which the parents provide basic support for the child's schoolwork. This is a particularly appropriate method of interaction as the child becomes more independent, in the middle school and high school years, he says, when children are less likely to welcome their parents' presence in the classroom.

The role of the parents, Sigel feels, is "to facilitate the learning environment at home, and to be a facilitator in setting certain constraints and discipline in the follow-through process.

"Sometimes," he says, "it's unreasonable for the teacher to expect the parent to do more than provide the resources and to provide general support. The major responsibility for schoolwork still belongs with the child."

While the methods of parent involvement vary, the programs are more likely to be successful when parents and schools share a belief in certain principles.

These principles are enumerated in the book *Beyond the Bake Sale*, a valuable basic handbook on parent participatory programs written by Anne T. Henderson, Carl L. Marburger, and Theodora Ooms. The principles are:

1. Every aspect of the school climate should be "open, helpful, and friendly."

2. Communications with parents should be "frequent, clear, and two-way."

3. Parents should be "treated as collaborators in the educational process, with a strong complementary role to play in their children's school learning and behavior."

4. Parents should be encouraged to comment on school policies and, in some cases, "to share in the decision making."

5. The school should recognize its responsibility "to forge a partnership with *all* families in the school."

6. The principal and administrators should "actively express and promote the philosophy of partnership with all families."

7. The school should encourage "volunteer participation from parents and the community-at-large."

Of primary importance for the parent, says Sigel, are a basic interest in and support of school activities. "The schools should recognize that parents have a right to know what the child is doing, and there should be a mutual understanding of the functions of school and family," he says.

Home support is also one of the factors considered important by Ekstrom, Goertz, and Rock in their book, *Education & American Youth*. "A student's home educational support system is an important factor in explaining cognitive growth of high school students," they write.

Since home support for a child's education is a basic necessity for

success, a wide range of programs have been developed all across the country to accomplish that goal. A small sampling of some types of parent involvement programs are included here.

Programs

One: TIPS

One method of encouraging home support for learning, being used in many schools, is for teachers to develop homework projects for the students to do cooperatively with their parents. Epstein addresses this concept in a process she has developed called Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS).

While some researchers, such as ETS's Sigel, feel that such homework projects intrude both on the parents' time and on the methods they choose for interacting with their children, Epstein disagrees. Homework projects such as these, she feels, ensure that all children, not just those with motivated parents, gain the benefits of parent interaction.

"We hypothesize," Epstein writes, "that parent involvement in specific subjects — such as math and science — will increase student skills and positive attitudes in those subjects. . . ."

TIPS provides "structured activities" in elementary school math and science so parents can see what their children are working on in school, discuss projects with them, and provide help, if needed. TIPS also provides activities in middle school social studies designed to draw parents into the education process.

The difference between the two programs, Epstein explains, is that "the task in elementary schools is to help parents direct their participation into helping their children academically. The task in middle schools is to get them more involved with the school in the first place. . . ."

Two: Parent and Child Literacy Intervention Program

The Parent and Child Literacy Intervention program, funded by the U.S. Department of Education, is a collaborative effort between ETS and the National Council of La Raza. The project is designed to develop the parents' literacy skills so they are better able to interact with their children. Experimental programs have been under way in 10 cities for the past two years, says Ron Solorzano, project consultant and a researcher at ETS's Pasadena office.

Although the criterion for the program is that the parent have a child receiving native language instruction in a Title 7 school, the literacy program concentrates on the parents, not on the child.

"We use a language experience approach," says Solorzano. "Parents talk about family themes with a teacher, and then they dictate or write stories that are ultimately put together in book or portfolio form and shared with the children. Then the parents are shown how to read the stories with their children."

The program takes place in a community center which is an affiliate of the National Council of La Raza, a Hispanic community organization with centers all across the country.

There are three parts to the model, says Solorzano. In the first part, the parent is brought into the story-writing process by a program facilitator. Next, parents and children are encouraged to participate in a series of what they call home literacy events. These include the parents reading their stories to the children, and parent and child exercises using the calendar for planning and scheduling, working with the clock or the television guide, or similar activities involving basic literacy skills. In the third part of the program, parents are encouraged to use books, magazines, and reading materials from the community center to read by themselves or with their children.

Although it is different from most parent-child interaction programs because it is not based in the school and does not focus on the children, the program has the same goal as

other parent interaction programs — to prompt parent interest and support of their children's schoolwork as well as increased parent-child interaction.

Three: Family Math Program

One outreach program designed specifically to promote educational success for minorities and girls is the Family Math program, initially developed by the Lawrence Hall of Science, a public science center and research and development unit in science and mathematics at the University of California, Berkeley.

The program was the subject of a case study prepared last year by Beatriz Clewell, an ETS researcher who analyzes intervention programs, especially those designed for minority and disadvantaged students.

In her research, Clewell says, she has found that "programs that incorporate a parent involvement component are more successful. Once the parent is involved, they make sure their kid goes to the program, they work with them on their projects, and they're more interested."

The Family Math program, initiated in California in 1981, has now expanded across the United States and into several other countries. The program's objectives include involving parents with their children in doing math through shared activities, providing them with information about equity issues concerning math, and helping them to develop problem-solving skills and to build self-confidence in the use of math.

As with the family literacy program discussed above, the program is not part of the school curriculum. Instead, it enhances and supports schoolwork outside of the classroom.

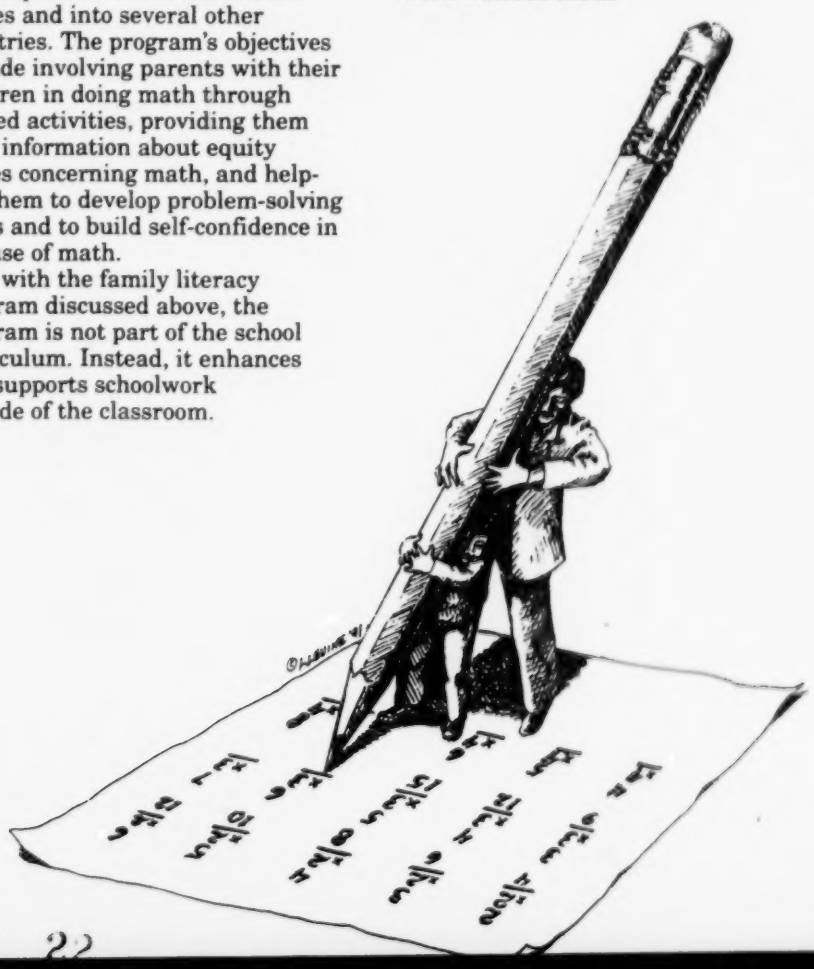
Four: Chicago's Governance Program

If Gash's classroom-based, small-scale parent reading program were positioned on a spectrum of parent involvement programs, it would surely find its place on the small end of the scale. On the other end of the spectrum would be programs that mandate having parents serve in school governance roles.

Such a program was started in Chicago in 1988 as an answer to a 41 percent dropout rate and low standardized-test scores. The innovative new program gives parents six of the 11 seats on the school council of each of the city's 542 schools. As expressed by Theodore D. Kimbrough, general superintendent of Chicago's schools, the radical change in governance was designed "to galvanize the local school councils into reforming."

Although the program remains controversial, and results are not expected to be visible for up to 10 years, Kimbrough says he supports the concept of including parents in decisions about schools.

His reason provides a rationale for every parent involvement program — as he bluntly explains, public education "is not going to work without them."



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